NCA
VOC PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5863 MAY 26, 1978
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UNIFIL IN LEBANON

ANNCR:

WITH JUST OVER TWO WEEKS LEFT BEFORE THE SCHEDULED ISRAELI PULLBACK FROM SOUTHERN LEBANON AND THE UNITED NATIONS TAKEOVER OF THE REGION TO BE EVACUATED, THE U.N.'S INTERIM FORCE IN LEBANON, UNIFIL, IS ESTABLISHING A ROUTINE IT HOPES WILL BE EFFECTIVE. CHARLES WEISS VISITED THE AREA THIS WEEK AND SENDS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

UNIFIL IS GOING ABOUT ITS TASK IN A BUSINESSLIKE WAY, CARRYING OUT ITS PLANS TO THE LETTER. I SAW A SENEGALESE PLATOON ON THE ROAD MOVING INTO U.N. CONTROL TERRITORY FROM THE POCKETS SURROUNDING THE PORT CITY OF TYRE. QUITE A LOT OF TRAFFIC MOVES THROUGH THIS AREA. AT A DUSTY LITTLE JUNCTION, ONE KILOMETER WEST OF THE LARGE VILLAGE OF ABA SSIYEH, MERCEDES TAXIS, EACH PACKED WITH TEN AND TWELVE PASSENGERS, KEPT SHOWING UP. THEY DUTIFULLY STOPPED AT THE SENEGALESE CHECKPOINT AND PATIENTLY WAITED WHILE A SEARCH WAS MADE OF THE TRUNK, UNDER THE HOOD, AND UNDER THE SEATS. WHEN NO ARMS WERE FOUND, THEY WERE ALLOWED TO PROCEED. BUT CARS TRAVELING IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION -- TOWARDS TYRE, WERE NOT STOPPED. I ASKED THE LIEUTENANT IN CHARGE WHETHER THEY EVER FOUND ANY CONTRABAND. HE SAID THAT IN THE TWO WEEKS HE HAD BEEN ON DUTY THERE, HIS MEN HAD DISCOVERED GUNS IN TWO CARS. THE CARS WERE TURNED BACK. HOWEVER, THE WEAPONS WERE NOT CONFISCATED.

A FEW KILOMETERS AWAY, NEAR THE VILLAGE OF MA-RAKAH, THE U.N. HAS SET UP IN TINY FRENCH-BUILT ARMORED CARS AROUND AN OLIVE GROVE WHERE A NUMBER OF ARMED PALESTINIANS HAD HOLED UP AFTER

INFILTRATING THROUGH UNIFIL'S LINE. WHEN THEY WERE FIRST DISCOVERED, NEARLY TWO WEEKS AGO, THE U.N. ESTIMATED THEY NUMBERED BETWEEN FIFTY AND SEVENTY MEN EQUIPPED WITH AK-47 SUB-MACHINE GUNS AND ROCKET-PROPELLED GRENADES. THROUGH BINOCULARS, I COULD MAKE OUT ONLY THREE OR FOUR MEN LOUNGING IN THE SHADE OF THE TREES. THEY HAD TWO PUP-TENTS. THE SENEGALESE UNITS STANDING GUARD SAID THEY WERE THE ONLY ARMED PALESTINIANS LEFT THERE. AT FIRST, UNIFIL HAD SAID IT WANTED TO DISARM THEM AND ESCORT THEM OUT OF THE AREA. BUT THE INFILTRATORS REFUSED. NEGOTIATIONS WENT ON AND THE LAST U.N. PROPOSAL WAS THAT THEY COULD KEEP THEIR WEAPONS BUT WOULD HAVE TO RETURN TO THE TYRE POCKET UNDER ESCORT. A U.N. SPOKESMAN SAID THEY REFUSED THIS REQUEST, INSISTING THAT THIS WAS THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE AND THAT THEY WERE STAYING. THE U.N. FORCE, WHICH IS DETERMINED TO AVOID AN ARMED CONFRONTATION IF AT ALL POSSIBLE, JUST SAT AND WAITED. FINALLY, THE HOT SUN, BOREDOM, AND THE LACK OF SUPPLIES HAD THEIR EFFECT. MOST OF THE ARMED PALESTINIANS HAVE FADED AWAY, PRESUMABLY EXCHANGING THEIR UNIFORMS FOR FARMER'S CLOTHES, LEAVING THEIR GUNS BEHIND IN SOME HIDING PLACE. UNARMED CIVILIANS ARE NOT QUESTIONED BY THE U.N. THIS TIME, UNIFIL'S SIT - AND - WAIT POLICY SEEMS TO HAVE ACHIEVED THE DESIRED RESULTS, AS IT DID IN ANOTHER CASE FURTHER TO THE EAST, IN THE AREA CONTROLLED BY THE NORWEGIAN CONTINGENT.

THE INCURSIONS INTO ISRAEL AND ATTACKS ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS BY ARMED PALESTINIAN AND LEFTIST GUERRILLAS WERE WHAT PROMPTED THE INVASION IN THE FIRST PLACE. WHILE THEY APPEAR TO BE SATISFIED WITH WHAT UNIFIL HAS ACCOMPLISHED SO FAR, THE ISRAELI'S ARE APPREHENSIVE THAT THIS GENTLE POLICY

WON'T WORK IN THE LONG RUN. THEY CLAIM THAT OVER A HUNDRED GUERRILLAS ARE ALREADY BASED BEHIND THE U.N. LINES. THE U.N.'S SECURITY COUNCIL HAS AUTHORIZED SIX THOUSAND MEN FOR UNIFIL. TO DATE, IT HAS OVER FORTY-SIX HUNDRED -- WITH THE IRANIAN AND FIJI BATTALIONS DUE SHORTLY, PLUS THE REST OF AN IRISH BATTALION. A SPOKESMAN SAYS THE FORCE WILL BE UP TO FULL STRENGTH A FULL WEEK BEFORE THE FINAL ISRAELI HANDOVER ON JUNE THIRTEENTH.

WJL/PY